

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-10 SAB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /066 W

----- 016907

P R 122042Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3271

INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

USUN 474

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 1432

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UN, PN, AR

SUBJECT: PANAMANIAN BID FOR SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT ABORTS

REF: STATE 054113

SUMMARY: A PANAMANIAN INITIATIVE TO OBTAIN ARGENTINE AGREEMENT TO CEDE ITS UN SECURITY COUNCIL CANDIDACY TO PANAMA HAS ABORTED. ALTHOUGH THE GOP'S EMISSARY, MINISTER OF LABOR MURGAS, INITIALLY PRONOUNCED HIMSELF CONFIDENT, THE GOP REPORTEDLY DECLINED TO STEP ASIDE ON THE GROUNDS THAT PANAMA'S DEMARCHE HAD COME TOO LATE. END SUMMARY

1. THE GOP, IN WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A BELATED BID FOR AN OUT-OF-TURN SEAT ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL, HAS ATTEMPTED, UNSUCCESSFULLY, TO OBTAIN ARGENTINA'S AGREEMENT TO DEFER ITS CANDIDACY IN FAVOR OF PANAMA. IN A MARCH 7 INTERVIEW WITH EFE WIRE SERVICE IN BUENOS AIRES, SPECIAL PANAMANIAN EMISSARY MINISTER OF LABOR ROLANDO MURGAS STATED HE HAD PRESENTED PANAMA'S REQUEST--CONTAINED IN A LETTER FROM FOREIGN MINISTER TACK--IN A DEMARCHE THAT DAY TO FOREIGN MINISTER VIGNES. CITING THE "DECISIVE" PHASE OF THE CURRENT CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS AS PROMPTING THE GOP'S UNUSUAL REQUEST, MURGAS REPORTEDLY  
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STATED HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT ARGENTINA WOULD CEDE ITS

CANDIDACY--AND FREE ITS COMMITTED LATIN VOTES--THUS ASSURING PANAMA OF THE NECESSARY SUPPORT. THE EFE REPORT, WHICH WAS FEATURED IN MARCH 8 GOP-CONTROLLED PRESS, QUOTED MURGAS AS INDICATING HE EXPECTED A RESPONSE SHORTLY.

2. WHETHER OR NOT MURGAS ANTICIPATED A FAVORABLE ARGENTINE REACTION WHEN INTERVIEWED MARCH 7, THE REPLY WAS NEGATIVE. IN A FOLLOW-UP EFE BUENOS AIRES REPORT ON MARCH 9, MURGAS STATED THAT WHILE VIGNES HAD ASSURED HIM THAT ARGENTINA "WOULD MAKE PANAMA'S CAUSE ITS OWN", HE HAD BEEN INFORMED IT WAS TOO LATE FOR THE GOA TO WITHDRAW ITS CANDIDACY.

3. GIVEN MANNER IN WHICH THE MURGAS INTERVIEWS WERE FEATURED IN THE GOP-CONTROLLED PRESS, WE BELIEVE THEY ARE ACCURATE AND THAT THE GOP INDEED MADE A DEMARCHE. WITH REGARD TO MOTIVATION, OUR GUESS IS THAT IT APPARENTLY OCCURRED TO THE GOP, ALBEIT BELATEDLY, THAT IF IT COULD PERSUADE ARGENTINA TO STEP ASIDE PANAMA MIGHT AGAIN BE ABLE TO USE A SEAT ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL TO REINFORCE ITS NEGOTIATING POSITION. THE GOP PUTS GREAT STOCK IN THE SUPPORT IT OBTAINED AT THE MARCH 1973 COUNCIL MEETING IN PANAMA, AND ANOTHER TURN ON THE COUNCIL AT THIS POINT WOULD REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENT AND ENDORSEMENT OF ITS ASPIRATIONS.

4. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER PANAMA HAD RECEIVED POSITIVE SIGNALS FROM THE GOA PRIOR TO THE MURGAS MISSION, ALTHOUGH THE GOP'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR AN ARGENTINE CANDIDATE FOR OAS SECRETARY GENERAL WAS EVIDENTLY INTENDED AS A QUID PRO QUO. WHY LABOR MINISTER MURGAS WAS SELECTED FOR THE ARGENTINE ASSIGNMENT ALSO IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR. FOREIGN MINISTER TACK WAS ENGAGED IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH AMBASSADOR BUNKER AT THE TIME, HOWEVER, AND MURGAS' GENERAL COMPETENCE, LOYALTY TO TORRIJOS, AND THE FACT THAT HE HAD BEEN TO BUENOS AIRES FOR THE 1973 PERON INAUGURATION MAY HAVE BEEN FACTORS. WHY MURGAS SPOKE TO THE PRESS BEFORE RECEIVING VIGNES' RESPONSE IS EVEN LESS CLEAR. A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION--UNLESS HE WAS ATTEMPTING TO PUT THE GOA ON THE SPOT--IS THAT HIS INITIAL CONFIDENTIAL

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CONVERSATION WITH VIGNES HAD LEAD HIM TO ASSUME THE REPLY WOULD BE POSITIVE.

5. NOTWITHSTANDING VIGNES' RECONFIRMATION OF ARGENTINE SUPPORT, THE GOA'S REBUFF OF PANAMA'S REQUEST--ESPECIALLY AFTER MURGAS' SEEMING CONFIDENCE--IS AN EMBARRASSMENT FOR THE GOP. ONE WIDELY READ COLUMNIST, CRITICA'S CAMILO PEREZ, HAS ALREADY CALLED FOR AN EXPLANATION

WHY THE GOP'S INITIATIVE CAME SO LATE.

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** REPORTS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, MEMBER ADMISSIONS, ELECTION CANDIDATES  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 12 MAR 1975  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
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**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
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**Page Count:** 3  
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**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** 75 STATE 054113  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 02 SEP 2003  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <02 SEP 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <03 SEP 2003 by GolinoFR>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
05 JUL 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** PANAMANIAN BID FOR SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT ABORTS  
**TAGS:** PFOR, PN, AR, UN, UNSC  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006